

# Practical Methods for Classroom Management

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The use of English as a teaching language is increasing rapidly all over the world. Many developing countries see English as an asset that must be offered to their students. One such country is Lebanon. There are several schools that teach children Arabic, French, and English simultaneously. In these primary and secondary schools, math and science are also frequently taught in English.

Many times, the teachers in such schools do not hold teaching certificates; they have degrees in math, English, or chemistry. Although the teachers are well informed in their fields and are enthusiastic, many could benefit from a brief overview of simple, practical, classroom management techniques.

In this article, I will review tried and true methods for harmonious class organization and discipline that I have acquired through many years of teaching and through observing other teachers I have worked with in Canada, France, and Lebanon.

## Smooth Classroom Organization

With sometimes as many as 30-45 students in a class, the teacher cannot do everything. You have to delegate tasks. Post a big, colorful chart on the wall; it can serve as a sign-up sheet every Friday afternoon for those children who wish to take responsibility for routine tasks such as distributing books, serving as messenger to other classes, and writing homework assignments on the board. I always add a news report to the list as well. The child in charge highlights major happenings in the world, the community, and his/her own family. By Thursday most children have become real pros and thoroughly enjoy the three minutes in front of the class. Make sure all the children in the class are encouraged to sign up for some sort of responsibility during the term.

Successful, happy classrooms I have seen are those in which orders are not always being given. At the beginning of the school term, take 15 minutes and make the ground rules clear. Some of the most frequently used are:

1. We always raise our hand and wait to be called on before speaking.
2. We never interrupt a classmate while he or she is speaking.
3. We always ask for permission before leaving the room.
4. We remain seated while others are speaking.
5. We respect our classmates' property.

Most primary and intermediate teachers post a copy of these rules somewhere in the classroom for easy access if necessary.

Establish a routine in your classroom as soon as possible. Children like to know what is expected of them. Every morning after the bell, I put five new words on the board. The children copy them in a special notebook and we briefly discuss their usage and use them in sentences. At the end of each month, I hold a class Spelling Bee with these words.

After lunch recess when children are excited, set aside 10 minutes during which the students write in their journals. In these notebooks the students write their experiences of the day-in English, of course. Some days, some children prefer to draw their experiences rather than write, but most often the children tell about what is happening in their lives. Besides adding to the feeling of organization in the classroom, this activity enables the teacher to create a separate relationship with each child. I try to collect, read through, and comment upon each journal every 10 days or so. The students always remind me to collect the journals and to “write back.”

Finally, don't wait till the bell rings to have the students put away their belongings. Make sure to leave two to three minutes so that everyone can collect their thoughts.

## **Student Management**

Teachers without formal teacher training tend to imitate management techniques used when they were in school. But writing out endless pages, or shouting, or humiliating the student are just not effective nor acceptable. Respect for the child is uppermost. Ask yourself the following questions concerning your classroom situation:

1. Are you asking the students to concentrate for long periods of time? If so, remember that young children-and the not so young-can concentrate only for short periods. Change activities every 20-25 minutes.
2. Are the children passive receivers of information or active participants? Call on many children to answer or to ask questions. Involved children have less time to “fool around” and bother others.
3. Is the subject matter relevant to the age level? Use visual aids in your teaching. Flash cards for practice with irregular verbs are appreciated by students of all ages.
4. Are you always behind your desk or in front of the board? If so, walk around when children are doing seat work. Encourage them; spot check some assignments that you have not been able to check.

If your answers to the above questions are positive, you are already on the right track. Remember to keep your voice at a normal level. Do not shout to be heard. Most classes respond well when they realize they will have to stop talking in order to hear the teacher. If there is noise in one corner of the room during the lesson, stop and wait. The guilty parties will usually stop.

Realize, too, that a classroom does not always have to be silent. There is “good” noise when children are working together, solving problems, and of course, talking in discussion groups.

Allow children to express themselves. If a child wants to share an event with the class and work is moving along smoothly, take the time to listen. When words from the native tongue slip in during these exchanges, as they will, have another child tell the class what the word means in English.

## **Dealing with Disruptive Students**

In all the classrooms I have observed and taught in, the large majority of the students have been polite, normal children or young adults. In a class of 30, three students will have slightly to highly disruptive behavior. The following simple methods prove successful in most cases.

Be firm. Explain to the child that excessive talking is not helping him/her to learn. Change the child's seat. Make sure the child is not bored. Give him/her extra responsibility, such as to prepare a special oral report. Be sure to compliment the child on any positive behavior he/she exhibits. For example, "I really appreciated how you helped Mary collect all the notebooks today." If disturbing behavior continues, withdraw privileges that are especially dear, such as participation in extracurricular activities, and explain why. Remember, also, to explain to the child how he/she can earn back the privileges. One especially effective method is for the child to spend recess time with you in the classroom with a task to carry out; I often use this time to talk with the child and reach a solution to the problem. Sometimes the child needs to work alone. If the administration has a room in which the child can do his/her work without attention from others, he/she will very often calm down.

I observed one primary teacher who, while speaking, just walked over to a child who was not paying attention and gently took him by the hand and brought him to the front of the class with her; the teacher's reaction was so natural that the child responded positively. Most children do react positively to the above measures. However, if they don't, I have seen the following system work with several disruptive children. Put up a chart with 10 stickers on it, e.g., colorful stars, footballs, etc. Explain to the child that for 10 school days you and he/she will evaluate his/her behavior at the end of each day. You will both decide if he/she deserves to keep the sticker or have it removed. If the number of stickers falls to, say, four, privileges will be withheld, or the child's parents will be consulted, or he/she will not be allowed to accompany the rest of the class on an outing.

If nothing works, as it sometimes doesn't, ask for help. With the school administrator, look into the family and health background of the child. Frequently, disruptive children have health problems such as hyperactivity or hearing, sight, or even psychological problems because of their home situation. Just helping to find such a problem is a step in the right direction.

## **A Good Classroom**

In conclusion, then, a classroom where learning takes place is a pleasant environment; the teacher is enthusiastic and active and encourages student participation. The teacher is firm but not unbending. Finally, one can see a smile on the faces of both teacher and students and even, at times, an outburst of laughter.

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